



DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MONTHLY MEETING OF
OUSTON PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2024 IN OUSTON COMMUNITY CENTRE
THE MEETING OPENED AT 7.00PM.

1. COUNCILLORS PRESENT

Chair Mr A Wake, Mr G. Batey, Mrs. A. Bell, Mrs. M. Duncan and Mr. D. Wood

County Councillors – Mr P. Pringle

Other Attendees – Parish Clerk - Lisa Blondrage and Residents Mrs C Dodd and Mr J Tate.

2. APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE

CC Batey and OCA

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 18TH JANUARY 2024

Previous minutes agreed and accepted by the PC.

5. REPRESENTATION OF RESIDENTS AND ALLOTMENT TENANTS

Mrs Dodd asked when the pot holes on Wentworth Park were going to be repaired. Cllr Wake suggested that Mrs Dodd, report the pot holes with photos. LB said if Mrs Dodd sends her the locations and supporting photos, she will report them via Do It Online.

Mr Tate asked what was happening with the Allotment Association. Cllr Bell said she attended the meeting but was unhappy as she invited the other PCs but they did not turn up to support her. Cllr Bell said she had done the allotments for 12/13 years and was not willing to do it anymore and whoever takes over must attend site and attend OAA meetings on behalf of the PC.

6. COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT

CC Pringle said that DCC have removed free parking and the CCs asked for the decision to be discussed at full council in January to see whether DCC would reconsider. A decision has not been made yet.

CC Pringle said the plans to build new leisure facilities for Chester Le Street and Seaham have been scrapped. The current facilities will be refurbished instead.

CC Pringle said it is proposed the DCC council tax will increase by 4.99%, to be agreed next week.

CC Pringle said the Chester Le Street Area Action Partnership are looking for public representatives from the local area.

CC Pringle to confirm the date for the local Big Spring Clean. Urpeth PC have invited OPC to join them for their litter pick around the BMX track and playing field.

For further information, please contact the County Cllrs.

7. OUSTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

7.1 Information from the OCA Board

The board submitted their apologies.

7.2 Telephone Box Library

Cllr Wake said he has seen telephone box libraries in other areas and wondered if the Community Centre would be interested in siting one in their porch. The library is a wooden box where people can freely give or take a book. Cllr Duncan will ask the board at their next meeting on the 6th March.

8. ALLOTMENTS

8.1 Ouston Allotment Association

Cllr Bell attended the meeting on behalf of the PC. The PC said they would like a proper association to be formed. At the OAA meeting, the Chair of OAA said they weren't prepared to take charge. The PC said they would like every tenant to be a member of the OAA. Cllr Bell added that most allotment sites are now ran by an AA. Mrs Dodd suggested that the PC meet with the OAA. She also asked how many tenants are a member of the OAA. LB to ask the Chair.

CC Pringle said when the Association was originally formed, it was optional for existing tenants to join and any new tenants had to join. Cllr Wake said he would check if we could force tenants to join. Mr Tate added, NSALG said it is a choice.

8.2 Proposed Rent Increase 2025/26

LB sent the PC a spreadsheet detailing income and outgoings from 2019 to date.

2019/20 Income - £2265.00	Outgoings – £3352.08	Deficit - £1087.08
2020/21 Income - £3145.00	Outgoings – £5091.58	Deficit - £1946.58
2021/22 Income – £3350.00	Outgoings - £2219.00	Surplus - £1330.94
2022/23 Income - £3550.00	Outgoings - £2598.44	Surplus - £951.56
2023/24 Potential Income - £3550.00	Outgoings - £2621.53 (as of 22 nd Feb)	Surplus – 928.47

Current rents – Small £45.00 Medium £55.00 and Large £60.00. LB said the PC need to be mindful that there is still asbestos on site and potential fencing repairs.

Cllr Wood said the rent should be only increased if there is a reason, for example costs to employ someone to manage the site. The PC said the rents would stay the same in the interim, to be looked at again at a later date. LB to look at the costs of employing a site manager.

8.3 Parish Council Allotment Subcommittee

Cllr Bell resigned from the Allotment Subcommittee. Cllr Batey said he would happily takeover from Cllr Bell, but he cannot do anything on a Saturday due to other commitments. Cllr Bell to meet with Cllr Batey to handover.

Currently plots 2b, 50 & 44b are vacant. 44a has now been let. The OAA Chair is meeting with potential tenants to let the other plots.

9. CLERK'S REPORT

Cllr Bell said there are ongoing parking issues on Arisaig. Cllr Wood said parking issues need to be reported to DCC Parking Enforcement. Cllr Wood will speak to Cllr Bell.

Allotments

LB to collect rents on Saturday 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th March at OAA from 10-11am.

Tenants reported thefts on site. Plot 36 said their plot had been broken into and a drill and strimmer were stolen. Plot 3 said their plot was also broken into and tools were taken from their shed. The PC said all thefts must be reported to the police, LB to contact tenants.

LB emailed Plot 1 regarding their bird numbers. The tenant said he got some hens for family egg supply. The tenant said he helped a friend out as they were giving up their allotment and needed to rehome their birds so said he would take them. LB said some tenants on site have more than 12 birds due to rehoming birds due to other tenants giving up allotments. She added that the birds may have to be euthanised due to being homeless and the kind tenants are doing a good deed by rehoming them. Cllr Wood said with this in mind, the 12 bird rule needs to be changed if the PC can't enforce it. The PC said the tenants should let the numbers naturally decrease.

Walkers Pest Control have proposed £2210 for 26 Visits (once every two weeks). LB said the tenants received a good service from Walkers and the PC agreed to award the contract for 2024/25.

OAA

An Allotment tenant asked Cllr Bell if DCC could take over our site as they were not happy as the PC did not terminate tenancies that felt needed terminating. LB told Cllr Bell, Durham County Council are not taking over allotments, they are doing the reverse. They are in the process of gradually handing the allotments to the Parish Councils.

As discussed in the last PC meeting, the Parish Council would like an Allotment Association to be formed in which they manage the site. The Association would be in charge of letting allotments, issuing letters, inspections and terminating tenancies etc. The PC will only grant appeals if proper procedures have not been followed other than that Association will decide who has tenancies. The Clerk will collect rents. Surrounding Parishes have Associations running allotments.

Do It Online

The Ouston Litter Picker has brought it to LB's attention that when he is collecting litter on a Monday, there is a lot of drug paraphernalia left near Ouston Community Centre. He said there are distinctive plastic bottles that have been used to inhale drugs near the garages behind Iris Crescent. He said, if you cut through the centre's car park and go up to the top corner behind the houses, there are several garages where the bottles have been left. LB emailed PCSO Mark Lumsden and asked, is it possible this could be added to an antisocial behaviour check area when patrols are in the area? He replied, saying they would patrol it on their rounds. The PC asked LB to contact PCSO Lumsden for an update. LB also emailed the Wardens via Do IT Online.

Make a Difference Campaign

North East local authorities are at the forefront of a new campaign to encourage people to make a difference where they live with a career in local government. Launched in January, the campaign aims to enhance the good work councils and combined authorities are doing in the region to attract talent by encouraging individuals to find out how they can have a role working in one of the hundreds of services used by and relied upon by communities every day, ranging from adult and children's services to planning, environmental health, libraries and leisure centres. LB posted information on the OPC website.

10. FINANCIAL MATTERS OF THE COUNCIL

10.1 Monthly Accounts & February Invoices

The expenditure for February was reviewed by the PC's.

11. Items to Follow Up for Next Meeting

The February monthly meeting agenda will include:

- Allotments
- Flower tubs

**The monthly meeting will be held on 28th March at 7.00pm. Business to discuss will be as per Agenda.
The Parish Council meeting closed at 8.05pm hours.**

APPENDIX ONE: CHEQUES SIGNED AT MEETING

		Paid to	Description
102179		L Blondrage	February pay
102180		L Blondrage	February HWA
102181		D Johnston	February pay
102182		HMRC - cxld	Re raised - 102186
102183		Durham County Council	Flower Beds
102184		'Local Authority Technology CIC'	Parish Online - Website Service Jan 30, 2024 – Jan 30, 2025
102185		Walkers Pest Control - cxld	Wrong Value sent by provider – see 102187
102186		HMRC	February PAYE
102187		Kevin Walker	Allotment Pest Control 2023/24